

Realities We Can Depend On

Ephesians 2:19-20

Some days it seems you can't depend on anything anymore. The world we live in seems to be changing so rapidly that the things we used to know were going to be there, are not. Our own government, which is supposed to protect us, apparently has been targeting certain segments of our population who hold differing viewpoints. Then there are the scandals in Washington, staggering national debt, terrorism, and the list goes on and on.

Take the case of the disappearing checks. Several years ago, banks in Chicago and Memphis lost nearly \$70,000 through a scheme in which a large deposit was made with a check, and then withdrawn before the bank officials caught on. In the meantime, though, that check began to deteriorate and fall apart. Police were baffled, but apparently the checks were treated with an unknown chemical which caused the checks to disintegrate about three hours after they were deposited. And lest we think that's funny, let's remind ourselves that we wouldn't like to be paid with checks that disintegrate!

But we've all known people with faith like that. Perhaps *our* faith has been like that occasionally. As long as everything is running smoothly, our faith is strong. But when circumstances are not exactly ideal, our world begins to fall apart. Perhaps we live in a fairy-tale world where we think everything should be just the way it is depicted in the movies or on television—where every problem is solved in just a few minutes.

Someone was quoted in *Reader's Digest* a few years ago as saying that “Real life is very different from soap-opera life. For example, in real life: You go to fewer than four parties a week. You have to look up phone numbers. Your great-grandmother looks her age. MONOPOLY is a game, not a way of life. The odds are the only time you were ever in a home worth more than a million dollars was when you paid two dollars a head for the tour” (John Gratton, May 1988).

Perhaps the reason our faith seems to fall apart when under pressure is that we are too unrealistic about the world we live in. Or perhaps it is because we rely too much on ourselves and on other people, and not enough on the Jesus we profess to follow.

Ephesus was the center of pagan worship, the home of the temple to the goddess Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Being a Christian in a city like that couldn't have been very easy, so Paul, a man who had already been through much more than most of us, wanted to give these Christians some stability and strength in their faith in Christ. He did it by pointing to some striking realities about Jesus, and about the life Christians share together in Him.

Practicing our faith in Christ isn't very easy today, either. If anyone dares to actually follow Christ, he or she finds that sometimes life is like a check that disintegrates when deposited, instead of like the dreamy world represented by soap operas. It is encouraging to be able to build our lives on some wondrous truths about Jesus that never change. These are realities we can depend on, and they are true for anyone who will follow after Him. What are they? Let's look at them.

1 Jesus is the Theme of our lives, v. 20

Paul says first that this faith of ours has a foundation, and that it consists of the apostles and prophets. But can we rely on the lives of those men personally? No, because they were mere human beings. We can, however, rely on the Christ to Whom they pointed. How do we know that Christ is the actual foundation? Because God's Word says so: *"So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed"* (Isaiah 28:16).

The Greek word translated "foundation" in Ephesians 2:20 gives us our English word "theme," and means "basic stone." Literally, the word means "something laid down." Most movies or plays have a strain of music which is heard again and again as the plot unfolds. Great movie classics such as *"Gone With The Wind"* and *"Dr. Zhivago"* all used musical themes which help to set the mood for any particular scene. If you're paying attention, you're hear that musical theme throughout the movie, sometimes at different tempos, sometimes with different instruments, but it's there. Those themes serve as a "foundation" for the musical score. The theme of a book or a conference sets the tone. The foundation of a building serves a similar purpose in that it determines the size and shape of the building to be constructed on it.

For the one who builds his life on Christ, Jesus becomes the theme of life. He becomes the One we long for, the One we think of, the One we strive to please, the One who gives motivation and impetus to living. Jesus sets me free to trust Him, even if I don't have all the answers about life, or about what happens to me. When

I remain true to Him, He fills my life and my heart with a melodious theme that permeates through my entire day, even if the circumstances are not what I would have chosen for myself. Building my life upon the Rock which is Christ gives me a solid, sure foundation, a foundation which is at one and the same time the theme of my life.

2 Jesus is the Cornerstone of our faith, v. 20

The second reality about Jesus we find here is closely intertwined with the idea of Jesus being the Foundation. Paul says that Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone of our faith. Very rarely are cornerstones today laid in the same way and for the same reason they were in Paul's time. Today cornerstones are laid in a ceremonial fashion, and are sometimes hollowed out in order to hold a metal container, in which are placed documents or newspapers or anything else which indicates the time and date of the construction of that particular building. Today's cornerstones are more like time capsules than actual cornerstones. Sometimes cornerstones will have the date of construction or other information inscribed on them. And they are not always necessarily located at the corner of a building.

In ancient times, however, the cornerstone was usually the first of the foundation stones to be set into place. It served as a real support for the rest of the building. If the cornerstone had not been cut squarely or was laid improperly, the entire foundation would not be true. If the cornerstone was weak or defective, the entire structure would be in jeopardy.

God knew exactly what He was doing when He chose Jesus as the cornerstone. Jesus became the very foundation of all that was to follow. We've mentioned that the Greek word for foundation meant "basic stone." The English word "foundation" comes from a Latin word which means "bottom." The bottom is the beginning point for laying a foundation. Jesus is at the very bottom, the beginning point of God's great and magnificent plan for providing salvation for us!

From the very beginning this awesome God we serve knew that mankind would be in need of redemption, so He lovingly provided a way for us to have it! That is why we are able to read in places like John 1:1, "*In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God...*" and in verse 14, "*And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.*" And we read this about God's Cornerstone in Colossians 1:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

That's exactly what a cornerstone did! It went down before everything else, and held the walls together.

Salvation is to be found in Him alone. How foolish we are to think that we can approach God on our own terms, making up all the rules for salvation, when God has already told us that salvation can come only through Jesus! Jesus must be the very cornerstone of our faith, or we are not really saved at all. If the cornerstone, having been laid since the beginning of creation, is not in place in your life, then the “building” you’re constructing is one day going to topple over. It may take a severe tragedy, such as the death of a loved one, or an extended period of unemployment, or an incurable illness. But without a proper cornerstone to provide strength and support, your life will one day crumble and fall. The Scriptures are clear and plain on this: *“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 3:11).

The Scriptures also teach us that Jesus is the Eternal Cornerstone. Jesus said this of Himself, *“Before Abraham was born, I am!”* (John 8:58), and *“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the beginning and the end”* (Revelation 22:13).

But how can a cornerstone be both the beginning and the end? That brings us to the third reality about Jesus.

3 Jesus is the Fulfillment of our hope, v. 20

The Greek word translated “chief cornerstone” is a compound word, meaning that at least two words have been combined to form a new word.

One of the words is “akron,” which sounds like the name of a city in Ohio. That is no accident, because it means “tip,” or “extremity.” Akron, Ohio does not have the highest elevation in the state, but it is constructed primarily on a mountain ridge.

This word “akron” is found in Luke 16:24 where the rich man in his agony in the fires of hell is quoted as requesting of Abraham that he send Lazarus to dip the “tip” of his finger in water. We see it in Hebrews 11:21 where it reads, *“By faith, Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of his sons, and worshiped as he leaned*

on the “top” of his staff. So, the idea behind the word “akron” is something at the very top, the highest elevation, the apex.

So if we take this word translated “chief cornerstone” in a literal sense, it could also refer to an apex-stone, that is, the one placed at the very top of a pyramid. There are not many true pyramids being built today, but we are familiar enough with those awe-inspiring structures to know that a pyramid has four sides, each in the shape of a triangle. When those four sides converge at the very top, they must be held in place by a single stone, itself shaped like a miniature pyramid. The apex-stone went on at the very last, and must have been cut exactly so it would fit on the very summit of the pyramid. If it didn’t fit exactly, the entire shape of the pyramid would be thrown off kilter. In that sense, the apex stone was the fulfillment of the pyramid. The pyramid was not complete until the apex stone was lifted into place.

Hebrews 1:1 tells us that *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.”* We can view those “many times” and “various ways” in which God spoke as being the four sides of a pyramid, all meeting eventually at the summit, the apex, the “akron.” The prophecy of the Old Testament pointed to Christ, and that is what the writer of Hebrews tells us in 1:2—*“but in these last days he has spoken to his by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”*

You see, Jesus fits all the prophecies set forth from of old. He meets all the qualifications. When Jesus came to the funeral of His friend Lazarus, one of the sisters of the dead man said to the Lord, *“I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world”* (John 11:27). How did she know the Son of God was to come into the world? Because the Scriptures were all pointing to Him! From the place of His birth (Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:1); to His virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:18); to His rejection by His own people, the Jews (Isaiah 53:3 and John 1:11); to His betrayal by a friend (Psalm 41:9 and Mark 14:10); to the thirty pieces of silver paid Judas for betraying Him (Zechariah 11:12 and Matthew 26:15); to His beating before His crucifixion (Isaiah 50:6 and Mark 14:65); to the manner of His death (Psalm 22:16 and John 20:27); to His resurrection (Psalm 16:10 and Matthew 28:19); to His ascension (Psalm 68:18 and Luke 24:50-51) —Jesus fits all of it. Everything! Pick it up and study it from all sides and angles, and you will find that Jesus is the apex-stone, the “akron.” All the prophecies made about the Messiah converge and culminate and meet at the apex—and His Name is Jesus!

He Himself said after His own resurrection, *“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms”* (Luke 24:44).

Because He has met all the qualifications, and has fulfilled all prophecy about Him so far, we who name the Name of Christ in our lives have this reality about which to build our lives: that all that remains to be fulfilled about Christ will one day come to pass. Everything I hope for, everything I trust in for my salvation, everything I hope in for my right standing before the God of the universe, everything culminates in Jesus, the apex-stone, the capstone, the akron, the fulfillment of my hope.

*I know a soul that is steeped in sin,
That no man's art can cure;
But I know a Name, a Name, a Name,
That can make that soul all pure.*

*I know a life that is lost to God,
Bound by the things of earth;
But I know a Name, a Name, a Name,
That can bring that soul new birth.*

--Author Unknown

And that Name is Jesus! And you can depend on Him! He is...

***The Theme of Life
The Cornerstone of Faith
The Fulfillment of Hope***

Number 13 in the Ephesians Series